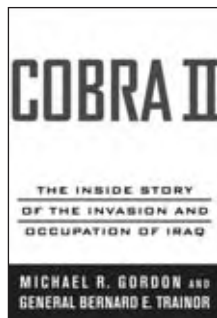


Worth Reading

Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq

Michael R. Gordon and GEN Bernard E. Trainor
Pantheon, 2006



Reviewed by Scott Curthoys, a retired U.S. Army Military Intelligence and Foreign Area Officer. He is currently working as a Counterintelligence Analyst contracted to a federal agency.

Bookstore shelves are groaning under the weight of books on the war in Iraq. Some are well written and provide the reader with an understanding of a very complex puzzle; others have been written merely as a vehicle for the author to espouse his or her own political views on the reasons the U.S. went to war. Whatever the author's motivation, the sheer number of books is reflective of the significance that the conflict in Iraq, and its aftermath, has for this country.

Despite the emotions surrounding the attacks of Sept. 11, the U.S. invasion of Iraq may rank as the defining moment of the first half of the 21st century. If the United States succeeds in installing representative democracy in a region unfamiliar with the concept, it would deprive those who advocate terrorism of some of the long-standing grievances that fuel their cause. On the other hand, if the current attempt at building a new Iraqi nation fails, and this is not a slight possibility, then the United States and its allies face a far more perilous course in protecting themselves from those who practice terror in the name of their god. Moreover, the seeds of a failure in Iraq were likely sown prior to the first shot of the war being fired.

In their book, *Cobra II*, authors Michael R. Gordon and GEN Bernard E. Trainor (U.S. Marine Corps., Ret.) provide a clear and riveting look at the military planning that went into the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, they give the reader a deep look into the lack of planning concerning postwar Iraq. The disconnect between planning for the invasion and not planning for the occupation, the failure to follow up a successful campaign with a workable plan to secure Iraq, is the most prominent thread running through the book.

This disdain for the “mushy” aspects of a military campaign should not be a surprise for those familiar with President Bush. As far back as Oct. 11, 2000, during a debate with his opponent, then candidate George W. Bush dismissed the concept of using troops for nation-building. “I think our troops ought to be used to fight and win war,” Bush stated. What is absent from this thinking, of course, is an understanding that war does not end with a referee's whistle; it often transforms into something that requires different objectives and resources.

What is evident in *Cobra II* is that the chaos of postwar Iraq is not just the result of circumstances, but can be traced to decisions made by the military and the civilian administration prior to and during combat.

Then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld exercised far more influence in the planning process for the invasion than his “it's not my plan” public pronouncements indicate. The authors discuss, in great detail, Rumsfeld's interest in the invasion plan. Specifically, they cite his constant pressure to limit the size of the invasion force, his alterations to the time-phased force and deployment list, and the fact that he did not direct U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) to designate a headquarters to secure postwar Iraq. Coupled with this almost unprecedented interference in what was normally considered “general's business” was an increasingly dysfunctional military structure. This was characterized by a marginalized Joint Chiefs of Staff, a CENTCOM staff in Tampa that required near constant care and feeding by subordinate headquarters in theater, and a Defense Secretary that took umbrage at the suggestion of one of his generals that the occupation of Iraq would require several hundred thousand troops.

This last point is indicative of why the failure to secure postwar Iraq could have been avoided. Rumsfeld's concept of a transformed military — to essentially do more with less — did succeed during the march to Baghdad. In moving up and down the military structure from platoon battles to the decisions of battlefield generals, this book chronicles the

impact of American technology. Improved reconnaissance and surveillance tools, precision guided munitions and a high degree of cooperation between the services allowed the United States to invade with a small force and move rapidly toward its objectives. However, this reliance on a small, fast-moving force had two consequences that, the authors indicate, were ignored during planning.

The first is that a small force would not have a sufficient number of troops on the ground to occupy Iraq. Even with the forlorn hope that the Iraqis would police themselves, the United States did not even have enough occupying forces to secure all of the suspected weapons of mass destruction sites prior to inspection. The second is the appearance of the Fedayeen on the battlefield.

Cobra II lays bare the misperceptions that guided the planning and strategy of both sides. Saddam Hussein was convinced that the principal threat to his regime was from internal unrest. He did not consider invasion by the United States to be a big threat, as even Iran ranked higher as a challenge. As a result of this perception, Saddam established the Fedayeen, ostensibly to combat an internal uprising until the Republican Guards arrived. The United States misread the foe and focused on destroying the Republican Guards as the main objective — completely missing the significance of the initial appearance of Fedayeen on the battlefield. As the authors point out, the first Marine casualty was killed by a man in civilian clothing riding in a pickup truck. The troops engaged in combat quickly adapted and began engaging the Fedayeen. However, the significance and impact of these irregulars was not realized at CENTCOM, as was evident when the CENTCOM Commander considered relieving the V Corps Commander, U.S. Army LTG William “Scott” Wallace, when he stated that U.S. forces had not planned for irregulars on the battlefield. U.S. Army GEN Tommy R. Franks (now retired) was focused on a rapid advance to Baghdad while his field commanders were trying to reduce the effects of the Fedayeen on their logistics.

The strength of *Cobra II* lies in the fact that it is not the history of a single battle, the story of a highly decorated unit or the biography of a single general at war. Instead, it is a comprehensive and dispassionate examination of 18 months of planning and the resulting invasion — explained with clarity by authors who understand the military and its unique culture.

Contracting Community Highlights



This issue's feature article highlights how the Army's use of an innovative strategic sourcing effort led to the award of contracts that will yield a savings of millions from cell phone and wireless communication acquisitions. These savings were made possible by the teaming of the Information, Technology, E-Commerce and Commercial Contracting Center acquisition workforce and its customers.

In addition to the feature story and the regular *DAR* Council Corner article, I introduce to you Karen Moser, the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Policy and Procurement) (DASA(P&P)) Competition Manager and Ombudsman. In the article, Moser, who comes to us from the U.S. Army Materiel Command, covers stewardship, personal objectives and measuring success. Moser's extensive acquisition experience will be an asset as she reinvigorates the DASA(P&P) Ombudsman and Competition Advocate programs.

Also featured is the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation contracting for robotics on the battlefield, and some insights and experiences faced by civilians supporting contingency and exercise support contract operations. I would like to send my thanks to the military and civilian personnel in these positions, who demonstrate every day a unique courage and professionalism in supporting our warfighters.

We appreciate support from the field in providing material for publication, and we hope you are finding the submissions informative and interesting. For more information, contact Emily Clarke at (703) 696-1675/DSN 426-1675 or emily.clarke@hqda.army.mil.

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